

Pentecost 7A. July 23, 2017. Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA. Isaiah 44:6-8, Romans 8:12-25. Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴ He (Jesus) put before them (the crowds) another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" ²⁸ He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" ²⁹ But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn." ³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

At coffee hour, we normally serve two kinds of coffee. You can't tell from smelling or tasting which one is which. You just have to trust the color of the pot or the labels that say "decaf" or "regular." If only one kind is served, you have to ask the person who made the coffee what kind it is. Sometimes the two types of coffee are mixed and you could never separate them.

With people, there are no signs or color codes that say "wheat" or "weeds." And we can't ask the person who made us. God isn't talking till the end of time. That is good news. Truth be told, each of us is like that farmer's wheat field where the wheat and weeds are so intertwined at the roots that it is hard to separate them. We may have listened to the Gospel and thought, "Whew! I'm glad I'm not one of those weeds!" Yes, I get the point. Don't pull other people out of the field; just wait for God to take care of them at the end. Well, there's more!

We live in the middle of Jesus' story: between seedtime and harvest. No matter how good our intentions, weeds spring up along with the wheat in the field that is our family, our community, our workplace, our congregation, and, yes, our very

souls. When we look at our own character we see good motives mixed in with our thoughtless acts. And careless words comingled with our noble deeds.

We are fortunate that the wise farmer tells the workers to keep their hands off, for we might be one of the ones uprooted. Either as a weed or as one of the wheat plants whose roots are so tightly wound around the weed that if one is pulled, the other comes along. Uprooting just kills the whole field.

Some of us have our days of being WHEAT; and an occasional day of being WEEDS, but if the whole field is to live, we must grow together till the harvest.

In the story, the servants come to the farmer and seem to accuse him of planting bad seed, asking, “Where did these weeds come from?” Sort of like, “How could you let this happen, God?” How often have we asked that question?

The farmer is clear: he was wise and powerful enough to plant good seed, but an ENEMY threw in the poisonous darnel weed seed. We can define the ENEMY as all manner of powers: a returning cancer, a lost job, an addiction, a death, war and greed, and turning our backs on people in need.

We know that God does not will or plan these tragedies for us. Our suffering is NOT part of God’s plan. God does not want us to suffer. God upheld Jesus through the tragedy of the cross. Even that cross was not strong enough to defeat God’s love. God is with us through even the most difficult of circumstances.

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This week I listened as one of our seniors told me a story. She was driving as a young student with two friends on an icy road on the other side of the Cascades. She suddenly became aware of the car sliding toward the edge of the road, toward a drop-off. She gripped the steering wheel, terrified that all three of them would die. She remembers hearing a calm, clear voice that said, “Take your hands off the wheel.” She obeyed the voice, lifted her hands from the steering wheel, and the car moved back into the lane and the friends continued their trip.

I love this story, perhaps more for the punch line than for the circumstance, although I’m grateful for the circumstance that allowed the young woman to grow up to become one of our congregation’s older faithful.

I love the punch line, the voice from above, “Take your hands off the wheel.” Now, we shouldn’t do that while driving a car – in most circumstances. But it’s another way of saying, “Let go and let God,” or praying “God grant me the serenity

to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. (Reinhold Niebuhr 1892-1971) or “You can’t control the wheat field – of the world or of your soul. Sometimes it’s necessary to trust God’s process, to trust the wise farmer, the good gardener.

Here at this church we have at least two things we want to control. We want to have a new pastor – and we want him or her NOW. We want to ease the pain of families experiencing homelessness – and we want to build a place for that NOW. Maybe the words of our wise old sister can help us, “Take your hands off the wheel.” “Let go and let God.” In both of these circumstances, as we are learning, patience is a great virtue. As the committees and teams are working careful and thoughtful processes, trust in God’s process is a great comfort.

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The Greek word for LET, as in “LET both the weeds and wheat grow until the harvest” can be translated “leave, permit, send away, or let go.” It’s the same word used for FORGIVE in the Lord’s prayer, “Let go of our trespasses. Forgive us our trespasses.” The translators could have said, “Forgive both of them to grow until the harvest.” It would have been a good choice because Jesus was about forgiving, not about condemning sinners. This can be a comfort for us when we recognize the side of us that is WEED. And this can be a relief for us when we see ourselves as WHEAT, spared from the need to root out the WEEDS.

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I love the seraph, the angel on the front of our bulletin this morning. The early church understood Jesus’ story to mean that at the end of time the seraphim – God’s fiery, burning angels – carried off the weeds to serve as fuel for the fire, perhaps for the oven that would be used to bake the wheat into bread. I like to think of this as God, in my last hours, carrying away all the weedy parts of me, and seeing me through Jesus’ righteousness as redeemed and fully wheat.



Look in the picture how tenderly this messenger of God is carrying the wheat, much like a mother carrying a young child, or a shepherd carrying a lamb. Such an image – far from being one we can prove or consider scientific or even rational – is an image of God’s love for the care and feeding of the world. For the wheat is entrusted to us to share, that all might be fed.

Hear the words of the ancient prayer. “As the grains of wheat scattered on the hill were gathered into one to become our bread, so may all your people from all the ends of earth be gathered into one in you. Let this be a fore-taste of all that is to come, when all creation shares this feast with you.” It was a Communion prayer! The bread we share in remembrance of Jesus is a gift for our souls.

There are no labels for decaf or regular on many coffee pots. And there are no signs on people calling them WHEAT or WEED. Perhaps we can pray for water to grow the wheat field until the harvest

As we wait for the harvest, we are confident that God is more powerful than the enemy. We nurture the wheat and strengthen all that is good around us. We can “take our hands off the wheel” long enough to let God pull us away from the edge of the icy road so that we can continue our journey of faith with joy and thanksgiving. And, as today’s Gospel writer says, “shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father.” Amen.

Called together in the Spirit's embrace, let us pray for the mending of God's world.

Enliven your church with love for your world. We thank you for the efforts of the many persons among us who work tirelessly for this congregation and for our neighbors. Bless the pastor who will eventually come to serve here and give us patience as we wait. Make us one in faithful witness to your will. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Renew the life of this earth, O God, even as it groans because of misuse and decay. Cultivate in us an eager longing for a healthy and life-giving earth. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Bridge the chasms that divide the nations, O God. Inspire a reconciling vision among the world's leaders, and bring together people of differing commitments for the sake of the world's most vulnerable people. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Embrace those who suffer, O God. Give peace to all who are near death, hope to those who are depressed, shelter to people who experience homelessness, and healing to the sick (*especially Les, Ruth, Loren, Ginger, Marie and those we name...*). Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Embolden our witness to your love, O God. Send us out into the world with courageous hearts, persistence, and holy wisdom. Inspire us to tend to and delight in our children's and grandchildren's faith. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your care through Christ our Lord.

Amen.